

**The Australian National University
Institute of the Arts
Visual Arts Graduate Program**



**Canberra School of Art
GRADUATE DIPLOMA OF ART
1996**

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**REPORT
PRESENTED IN PART FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS OF THE GRADUATE
DIPLOMA OF ART**

Abstract

QUESTIONING THE USE OF PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT IN CHILD-REARING: I will employ Printmaking and Bookbinding techniques in order to create a body of work which questions the use of physical punishment as a parenting tool. A study taking the form of an exhibition of Printmaking and Bookbinding techniques at the Canberra School of Art Gallery from March 5 to 10, 1996 which comprises the outcome of the Studio Practice component (50%), and the Research Paper ((50%)), together with the Report which documents the nature of the course of study undertaken.

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Introduction

My postgraduate exhibition will consist of eight works executed using techniques within the disciplines of Printmaking and Bookbinding. This report will discuss each of the works in the exhibition describing the techniques, materials and theoretical foundation for each piece.

I have drawn upon a number of themes which constitute the common threads running through the entire body of work. The dominant theme is the widely held notion that the home is a private place and the activities which take place within the home, including assault, are to be kept secret. Current Australian domestic violence laws are derived from English laws which are themselves derived from a series of bourgeois legal changes in the mid-to late-nineteenth century. These legal changes were constructed upon the ideology of privacy and informed by an intellectualisation that the home is a private place and should be regarded as a haven in a heartless world. Steven Parker observes this rhetoric more cynically as “a place where patriarchal power can be exercised without restraints”.¹

Furthermore, it is a commonly held misconception that private actions within the family unit, including the discipline of children, have always been beyond the jurisdiction of the legal system. Representing the Australian Family Association, Susan Bastick reaffirmed this misconception when she said “It is not the role of the government to intrude into the workings of a family and say ‘These are the ways you may, or these are the ways you may not discipline children’”.² This argument put forward in defence of a parent's prerogative to physically discipline their child, regards the government as an institution over-stepping its authority. This view, however, ignores a long history of legislative control which permitted an “acceptable” level of violence in the home under the banner of “lawful correction”.³ The “rule of thumb” is a case in point where legal authority was given to a husband to beat his wife so long as he did not use a stick thicker than his thumb.⁴

Printmaking and Bookbinding are apposite media for dealing metaphorically with this subject of violence in child-rearing. Bookbinding for the intimate and secretive qualities it embodies. Printmaking for the flexibility as a medium.

Historically, books have been associated with the possession of knowledge and power. The bearing that teaching and antiquity have upon the subject of parenting is akin to the complex manner in which power and knowledge validate each other, in order to legitimise an empirical body of knowledge as natural and commonsense.

The book is an appropriate vehicle for exploring the subject of parenting due to its social significance as a symbol of knowledge and of teaching. Parents are also symbols of a system which imparts knowledge through the ~~hierarchical~~ ^{hierarchical} relationship between parent and child. Children will, through complex psycho-analytic reasoning, cite their own parents, teachers and professors as authorities, and as a consequence, perpetuate as naturalised a system of behaviour management based upon the threat or delivery of physical violence. Common anecdotal expressions such as “I will beat some sense into you”, demonstrate that teaching and physical correction are widely accepted to be complimentary components of child-rearing.

The central theoretical aim of my exhibition is to turn the spotlight onto the practice of “disciplining” children through the use of physical chastisement. Contemporary child-rearing is informed by a history of parental practices which perpetuate a culture of violence against children. Furthermore children continue to be the only citizens in Australia against whom the wilful infliction of pain is both socially and legally condoned, with protection by the law only attained at the age of eighteen.⁵

FOR YOUR OWN GOOD

In her book "FOR YOUR OWN GOOD: The Roots of Violence In Child-rearing" writer and psychoanalyst Alice Miller describes the empirical child-rearing practices employed by the majority of parents within western society as "poisonous pedagogy". Alice Miller writes:

When people who have been beaten or spanked as children attempt to play down the consequences by setting themselves up as examples, even claiming it was good for them, they are inevitably contributing to the continuation of cruelty in the world by this refusal to take their childhood tragedies seriously.⁶

I have used "For Your Own Good" as the title for an artwork (figure 1) which is directly based upon a common children's game and which draws upon some of the aspects of "poisonous pedagogy" to which Alice Miller refers. I have chosen this simple children's game as a vehicle to access a number of interconnected issues that link the violence done to children, children's learning processes and how, through play, children apply their learned behaviour.

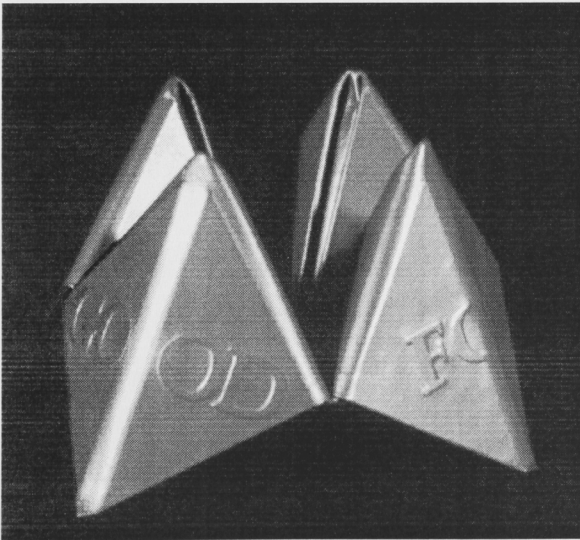


Figure 1: For Your Own Good,
(1996.) Leather, Cardboard.
49cm x 49cm.



Figure 2: For Your Own Good.
(1996) (Detail)



Figure 3 For Your Own Good. (1996) (Detail)

As a basis for this piece, I have chosen an easy to construct children's game in which children typically participate as willing "victims". Knowing that the outcome will be in some way a personal ridicule, they nevertheless choose to be the butt of the "joke".

In the game made of paper, children commonly use symbols and ideas, based upon their knowledge of the world, which they know to be socially embarrassing such as “you love” or “you smell like a”. All the children participating in the game have the opportunity to make their own version and can therefore engage as both victim and perpetrator. However, unlike the children’s game, the victim within pedagogy always occupies the position of victim.

From an adult perspective, the children’s game is viewed as employing an unsophisticated childish use of pencil and paper in its construction. In contrast, through the use of “adult” skills associated with greater intellectual development, such as the use of Printmaking techniques and the formality of bookbinding, I have recontextualised the game into the “adult” sphere.

The large format serves to emphasise the importance of the object and by being physically difficult for small (children’s) hands to manipulate, further locates it within the realm of the “adult” world. By placing the object in the context of the art gallery it is finally removed from the reach of children.

In this piece (as in this entire body of work) leather is employed as a metaphor for skin and the raised markings are a metaphor for welts left on the skin.

A child who resorts to violent or rough play is commonly considered to have “picked up bad habits”. I have chosen violent options for the adult version of this game to emphasise to the viewer the possibility that violence in child-rearing could be a form of “bad habit” based upon an empirical knowledge of parenting.

I have chosen to display two versions of the game in my exhibition. One version is based on a children’s dictionary model, and will be presented inside a glass display box. The dictionary cover is of polished leather, with relief lettering “FOR YOUR OWN GOOD” and numbers “1” to “8” (figure 1). The inside panels have printed illustrations which are accompanied by a dictionary meaning (figure 4). This dictionary version is intended to represent a refined, formal object, the construction and positioning of which not only elevate and legitimise its contents, but also provide a platform upon which to base the academic status of the second, relief version. The

cover of this second version has been left unpolished so that it retains the tactile quality and aroma of natural leather, and will be displayed in the gallery as an interactive piece.

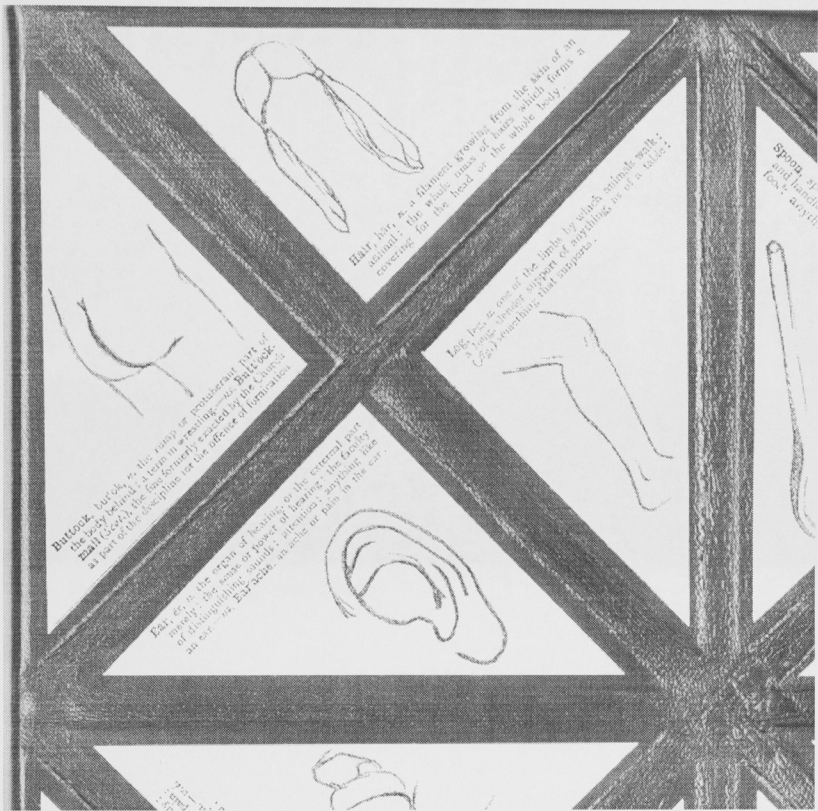


Figure 4: *For Your Own Good*. (1996) (Detail)

Both versions of the game are constructed from 2 mm thick, triangular shaped, acid-free cardboard pieces which constitute the framework. On the triangular pieces are 1 mm thick cardboard cut outs of the words “FOR YOUR OWN GOOD” and numbers “1” to “8”. The dictionary version has the images and text printed onto calligraphy parchment and glued to the leather.

The relief version has the letters, numbers and image shapes cut out of the 1 mm cardboard and glued to the framework. Each work is covered in two pieces of leather. One piece of leather covers the front and has a 1 cm

overhang which folds over the back. The second piece of leather covers the back. The ideal distance between each triangular frame is 1.5 cm.

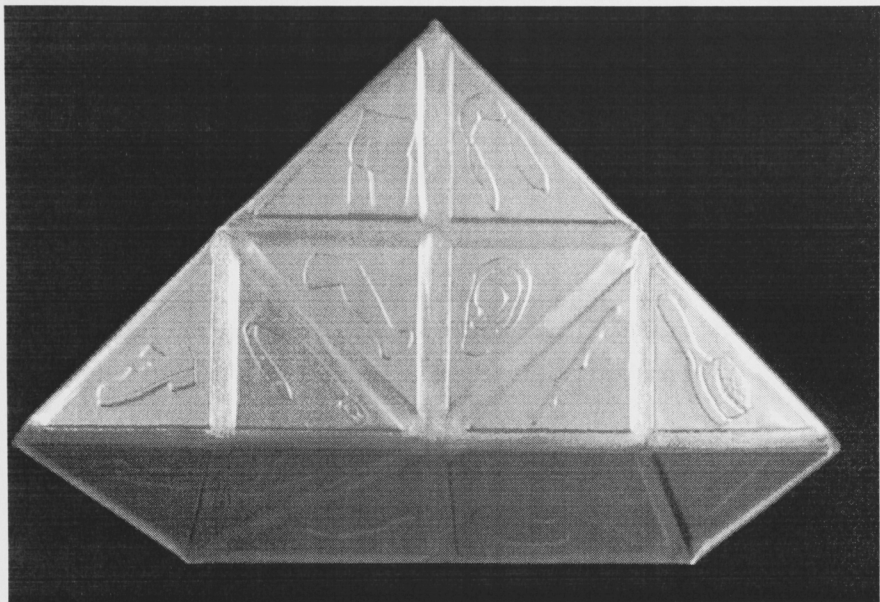


Figure 5: For Your Own Good, (1996) (Detail)



WE CAN RUN AWAY: The River Mud Incident

Children's misdemeanours are often described as major offences and dealt with in a harsh manner both within the fictional text in children's books as well as in the family home.

WE CAN RUN AWAY: The River Mud Incident, (figure 6) draws upon elements contained within children's books, children's crimes and punishment and the secrecy that surrounds violence within the family unit. The crime committed by the child in WE CAN RUN AWAY: The River Mud Incident is to go down to the river and get river mud on his/her clean clothes. The punishment for this crime is physical chastisement with a belt. In this piece I am questioning the validity of having a justice system for adults which promotes "punishment fitting the crime", though for children, punishment often exceeds the crime.

This adventure story can be unravelled as a narrative in five chapters (panels) leading the reader to expose the final chapter in which the child suffers the consequence of his/her actions (being hit with a belt). The interdependence of the action and its consequence ensures that the entire anecdote remains an open secret. Thus, the secrecy which surrounds the whole episode is only given form as the object folds-up to contain the story in a series of hidden layers.



Figure 6: WE CAN RUN AWAY: The River Mud Incident, 1996. Leather; Cardboard. 8 cm x 11 cm x 2.8 cm (folded), 8 cm x 68 cm x 2.8 cm (unfolded)

This piece has undergone a number of developmental variations. Earlier versions included attempts at embossing the leather covered panels using deep bite etching plates. I employed a number of techniques including inking up the plates in the traditional intaglio manner before printing the plates onto leather panels. Other techniques included artificially aging and fatiguing the leather using chemicals as well as abrasive tools. The most successful was the relief version (figure 6) which is to be displayed in the exhibition.

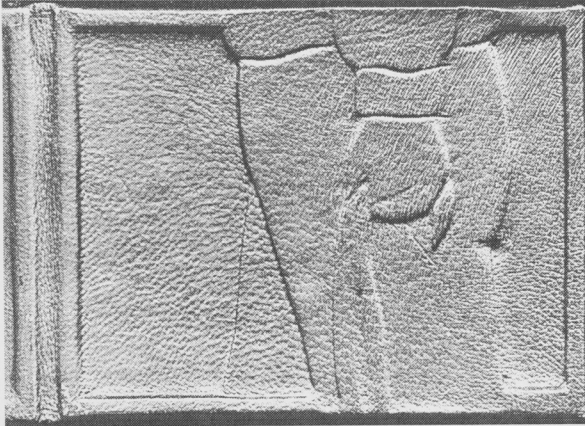


Figure 7: WE CAN RUN
AWAY: The River Mud
Incident. (1996) (Detail)

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

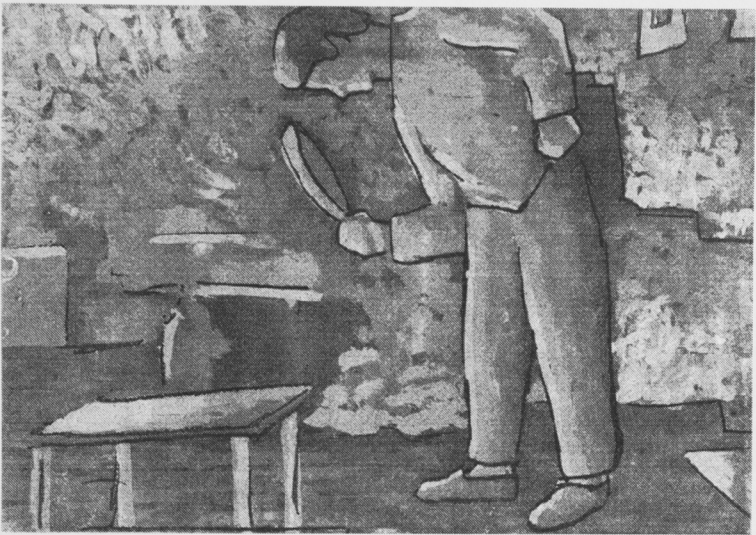


Figure 8: Spot The Difference, 1996. Aquatint. 24 cm x 17 cm.

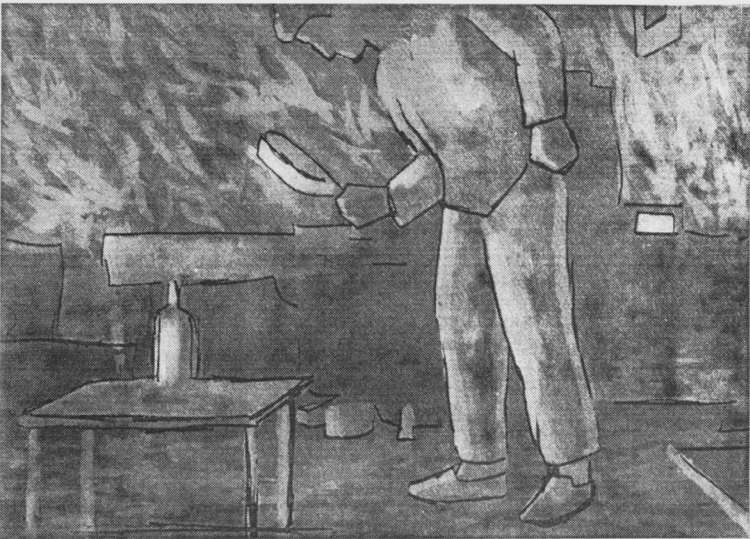


Figure 9: Spot The Difference, 1996. Aquatint. 24 cm x 17 cm.

Discussion about child abuse is commonly centred around extreme, and often sensationalised cases of violence inflicted upon children. The perpetrator vilified within the mass media and by an outraged general

public, is branded a “bizarre aberration with no connection with ‘us’ or with general social attitudes, practices or conditions.”⁷ Dr Ania Wilczynski (Doctor in Criminology on Child-killing) goes on to say that “....there are strong connections between filicide and both non-fatal and so-called ‘normal’ parenting.”⁸ Convicted “child abusers” are seen to have gone “too far” and therefore the fault rests with the individual, not with the use of violence in parenting. The notion that there is a point which is deemed to be “too far” establishes a culture of spotting small differences between violent parenting practices.

The work entitled Spot the Difference was originally conceived as a series of etchings depicting a perpetrator assaulting “his” victim with a frying pan. This book was an attempt to deal more directly with the visual representation of domestic violence. I wanted to avoid representing the victim in a victim’s role and for that reason I chose to remove the victim entirely and by doing so direct the focus onto the action itself. To further direct the viewer’s attention towards the act itself, I entitled the piece Spot the Difference, in order to challenge the viewer to engage in a futile exercise of spotting the differences between images which are clearly quite different.

The use of a subtle aquatint and low contrast tonal variation belies the violent action taking place within the image. This set of six etchings will be presented in a book format. The etchings in the book are printed on 100mg Hahnemuhle, and are folded into a compact and concealed format. The pages open-up and expand to reveal the hidden subject. The series is comprised of four similar and two very different etchings. The leather cover will bear a cut-out relief frying pan drawn from the images within the book.

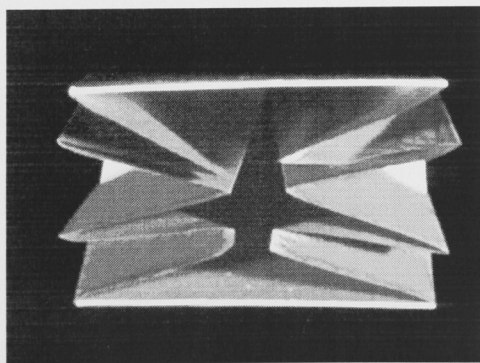


Figure 10: Spot The Difference. Example of the folding page construction.

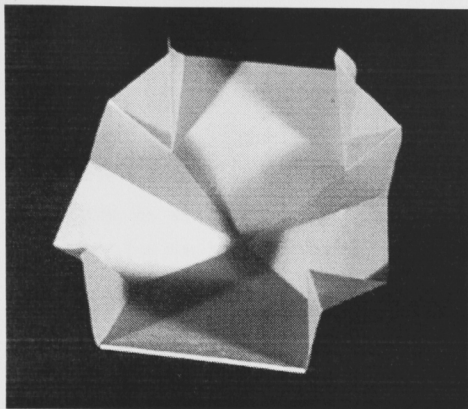


Figure 11: Spot The Difference. Example of image unfolded.

A MEASURE OF DEGREE - A SENSE OF PRIDE

This series also refers to the irrelevance of spotting the difference at the expense of ignoring the activity itself. The plates are deep etched versions of the same image, a man carrying a belt. Employing the deep etching technique is an attempt to use the “violence” done to the plate as a metaphor for the violence done to the child.

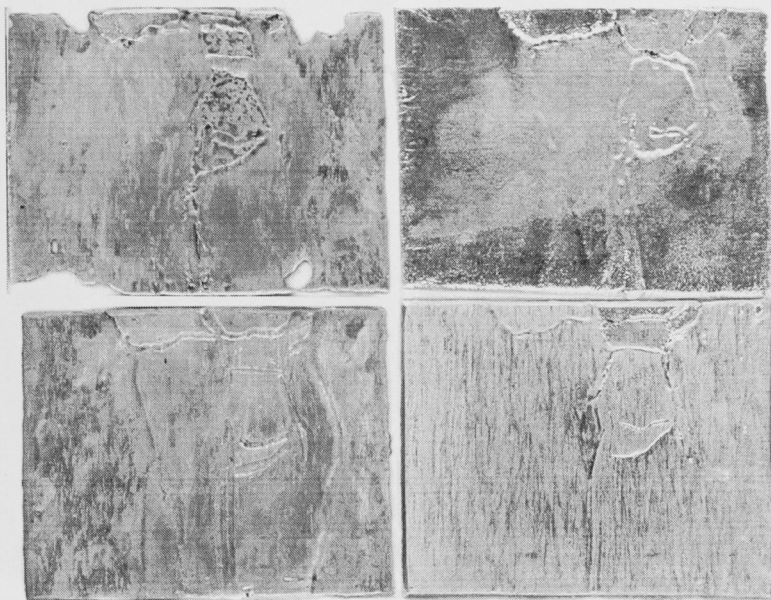


Figure 12: Four of the six plates in the series A measure of Degree - A Sense of Pride. (1996).
Plate size 8 cm x 6.5 cm.

The six plates are mounted in a concertina style set of leather frames and presented in a format which references the desktop photographs found on office desks. The zinc plates were bitten in a solution of 1:3 ratio acid to water. The bitumen resist was removed at different stages allowing the acid to eat away at the plates for different lengths of time.

Intaglio prints taken from these plates, trace a linear progress of decay. These prints will be mounted and displayed in the exhibition alongside the zinc plates.

ADVENTURES IN A CASTLE

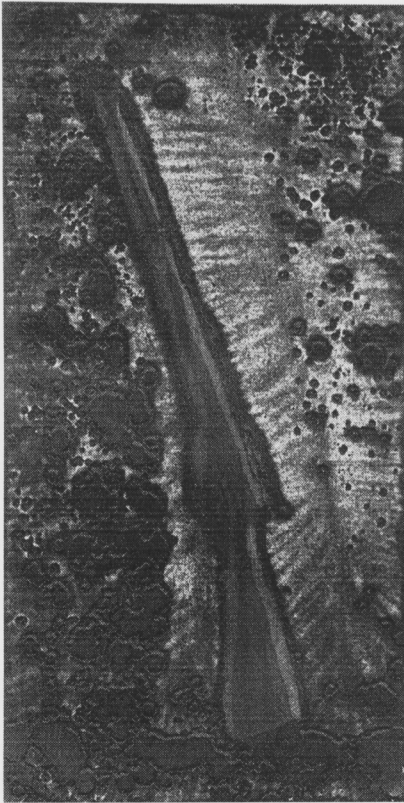


Figure 13: Etching from Adventures in a Castle.
(1996) 23 cm x 12 cm.



Figure 14: Etching from Adventures in a Castle.
(1996) 23 cm x 12 cm.

Adventures in a Castle again approaches the topic of violence against children from the perspective of symbolic representation. The objects depicted are a comment on cultural constructions which inform our perception of childhood, through the use of symbols and icons commonly found within children's books. For example, the gun (figure 13) may represent a harmless wooden toy for use in imaginative play, but it may also be interpreted as a socialising symbol of power. The symbol of the gun is all that is required, a straight stick for example could be a gun. It is understood that children should be warned about dangers such as spiders (figure 14) though children may be more terrified of cockroaches (figure 15) which pose little if any danger to human health. Children learn their fears from a

number of sources, including their parents. However, with fear comes a need for protection, which in itself could be interpreted as nurturing a form of dependence and therefore, disempowerment.

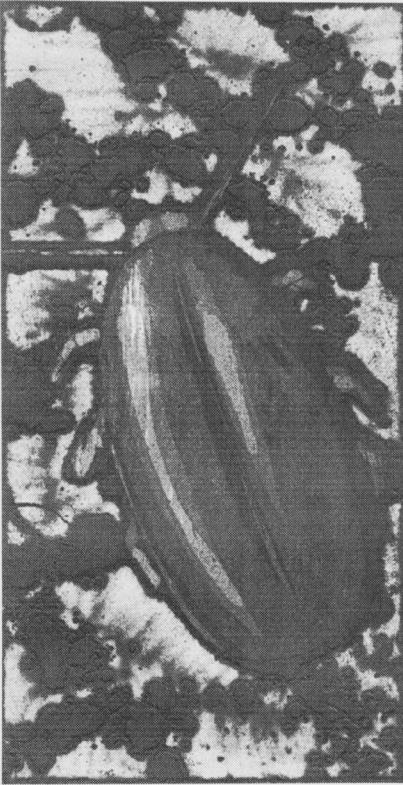


Figure 15: Etching from Adventures in a Castle.
(1996) 23 cm x 12 cm.

In Adventures in a Castle, the objects I have chosen do not carry the reductive representational references or form a narrative such as the one found in WE CAN RUN AWAY: The River Mud Incident. The book is intended to leave the layered meaning and hidden references open to interpretation. For that reason the cover, in the shape of a house, is made up of several layers with the features of the house also made up of hidden layers. The cover of the book conceals the images, the images conceal their meaning.

The title Adventures in a Castle combines references to children's adventure books with the cliché "a man's home is his castle". The walls of this metaphoric castle are intended to reflect what Alice Miller calls

"Society's invisible walls" which "totally block off any awareness of the suffering of the humiliated and manipulated child".⁹ Here again, reference is made to the hidden problem of domestic violence. The cover is a regimented, regulated and ordered facade which hides disturbing images, just as the outward facade of a wholesome, idealised family unit may hide its own dark secrets.

Adventures in a Castle questions the associations made with childhood through symbols which reflect adult intellectualisation of how children think and learn and how as an extension, how adults perceive they should be taught. In other words, how adults believe a child sees the world.

The central object in each etching is aquatinted to give the image volume and form. The surrounding area is deep bitten in a strong acid solution to create high plateaus which trap large quantities of ink around their base. The intaglio prints are made using black Charbonnel ink onto Velin Arches. The printing process embosses the paper creating added texture, depth and mood. The final effect is intended to evoke an atmosphere of seductive unease.

PARENTAL REPERTOIRE!

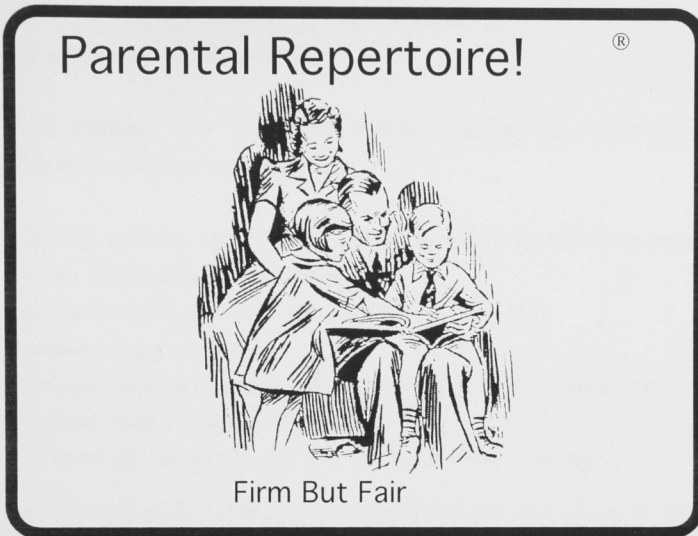


Figure 16: Parental Repertoire!. (1996) (Detail)

Parental Repertoire! is a game of chance for the whole family where behavioural management is decided by the role of the die. Take the guesswork out of discipline. It comes to you free this month as a special promotional offer. Forget the imprecise and unplanned emotional responses you are using today. You'll never have to worry about going too far again. With Parental Repertoire, you have a collection of tried and proven methods at your disposal. Teach your children that the world can be an ordered and predictable place. "Parental repertoire!" is also beneficial for the way it empowers your child by giving him/her the opportunity to choose his/her disciplinary process. The die tells them what to expect and guarantees that you won't go "too far". Select from our wide range of family profiles, the game that best suites you and your family. Our selection includes favourites such as; "Traditional Family Values" and the ever popular "Firm But Fair". Look out for the soon to be released "Spare the Rod and Spoil the Child".

Instructions: Cut-out, fold and glue the cards. Cut-out and assemble the die. Do not tell your children that the die is constructed in such a way that more often than not it lands on the number 6 (the wild card).

Rules: Roll the die to select a card. Move to that location. Roll the die again to select the correction strategy from our list of child behavioural management techniques. It's that simple!

For example, should you throw a "5":

Card number 5 is "The Automobile" (figure 18). Role again to select the physical chastisement technique.

- 1 = Slap with an open hand and accompany by a verbal message (roll again for the number of strokes)
- 2 = Punch (roll again for the number of strokes)
- 3 = Slam door on fingers
- 4 = Slam door on head (do not crush ears, eyes or mouth)
- 5 = Burn with a cigarette lighter
- 6 = Wait till we get home (invent your own technique)

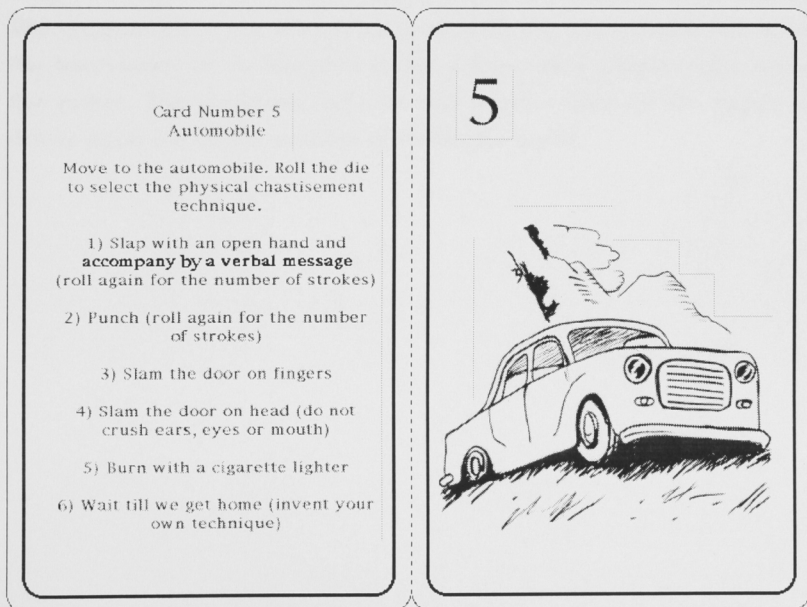


Figure 17: Parental Repertoire! (1996) (Detail) Card size 17 cm x 23 cm (unfolded) 17 cm x 11.5 cm (folded)

Children are taught that the world is a sane and ordered place but when it comes to discipline, as mimicked in this game, a wild card (the number six) can change all that. Also mimicked in this game is the manner in which the

parenting regime is weighted against the child, in that the logical conclusion is to hit the child.

Parental Repertoire! is presented as a book of images to be cut-out and assembled at home to make a game of six cards and one die. The cover is of marbled red leather on which a line drawing, evocative of the ideal nuclear family, depicts a contented Mum, Dad, boy and girl. The overall effect is intended to give a fifties or sixties suburban feel. On the back cover is the promotional blurb, which acts as an advertising lure, espousing the "benefits" of the product. The text recalls board-game jargon in order to heighten the authentic feel of the piece.

The drawings throughout the book are based on the stylistic conventions used for children's book illustrations of the fifties and sixties. The figures are drawn in outline with tonal values achieved through hatching and crosshatching. The images are limited to one flat colour with a black outline. The registration is not always accurate with the colour often falling outside the boundaries of its intended target. I have used 250gm Velin Arches for the prints. The thickness, texture and warm colour of the paper further draws upon the tactile qualities of children's books.

THE BRAG BOOK

The Brag Book is based upon the phenomenon known by the same name. Some parents and grandparents participate in this performance where they carry with them an album containing photographs of their children, for the purpose of “bragging” about achievements of their children which are, naturally, a direct reflection of their own successful child-rearing techniques. In this piece I have taken the theme to a logical conclusion where a particular aspect of the child’s upbringing has progressed to a high level of achievement.

Referencing material such as the Sexual Dangers of Spanking Children¹⁰ I have produced a set of twenty four screen print images 8 cm x 12 cm in a format the same as that of photographs. The images will be mounted in a photo album as well as mounted and hung for display as a group. The hung version will be a triptych as shown in figures 18, 19 and 20. The individual images in the photo album will be mounted with a chronological system of reference, giving the impression that the child has developed and progressed as a direct result of the spanking delivered in his formative years.

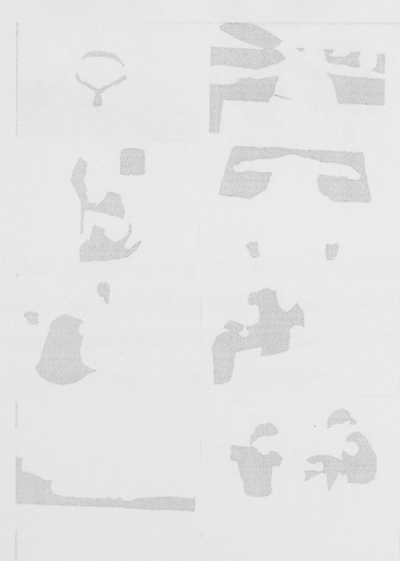


Figure 18: Brag Book. (1996) (Detail)

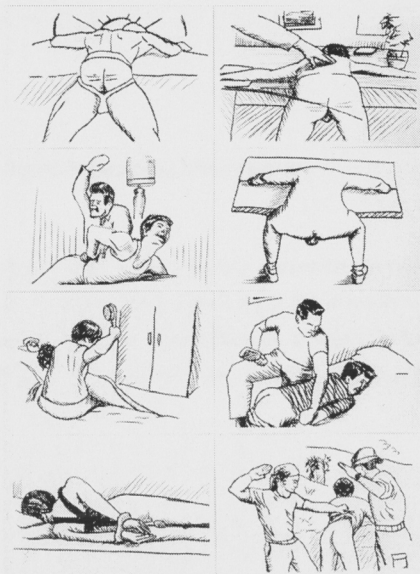


Figure 19: Brag Book. (1996) (Detail)

I have chosen to display the uncut triptych to represent the process of arriving at a result through a systematic approach. The mis-registration (imperfection) references a style of illustration and printing form used for children's books. It is also intended as a metaphor for imperfection in the approach to parenting which results in use of spanking as a form of discipline. The faults within the printing process are amplified and become apparent at the final state. The imagery is intended to reflect the amplification of the printing fault through the chronological amplification of the spanking activity.

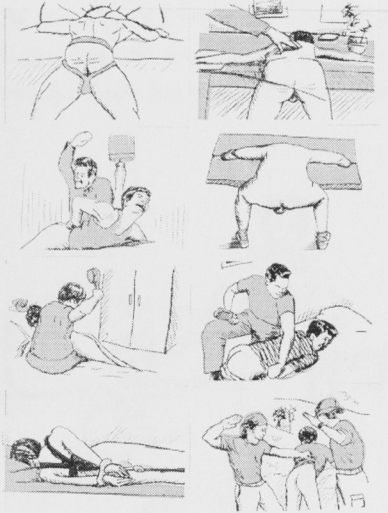


Figure 20: Brag Book. (1996) (Detail)

This piece is not intended to demonstrate that a particular parental action such as spanking will directly result in a measured adult outcome such as sexual pleasure from masochistic sexual play. It is intended as a vehicle for expressing the danger of using violence in child-rearing.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

The original concept of Crime and Punishment was that it would take the form of a book based upon the lever action and pop-up children's books. I investigated the possibility of creating a lever system where manipulating one lever would move one object a small distance while at the same time it would pivot the other lever and by doing so move another object a proportionately greater distance.

Figure 21 is an example of the original concept with the longer lever being the one responsible for moving the boy's arm at the elbow joint. The action of moving the long lever causes the shorter lever to pivot at a higher ratio, which moves the piece of litter downward as if the boy had dropped it.

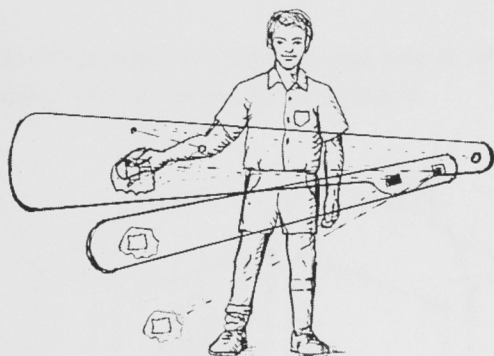


Figure 21: Working drawing.

The structural integrity of even the thicker papers is quickly undermined even after only a small number of repetitions of the action. The stress caused by the second lever was too great for the paper to withstand.

The Second Book of Hundreds of Things a Boy Can Make contained a design for A Punch and Judy show which I was able to employ for this project. (figure 22). It is a sturdy design and it gave me the ability to move different objects at different rates.

a bent wire as illustrated. The great point to remember in fixing the holes is to note that, when the wire is revolved, the bent arms must have sufficient room to clear the inside of the box. Now draw and colour two figures, Punch being one. Cut them out and fix them to the wire arms by means of gummed tape. As the wire handle is revolved,

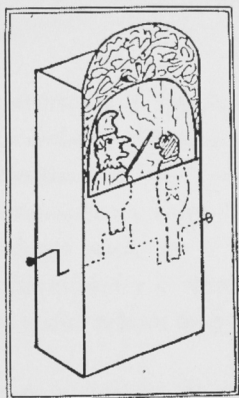


Figure 23. Illustration from The Second book of Hundreds of Things a Boy Can Make.

The final piece is a diptych, one side of which is intended to represent the crime and the other, the punishment.

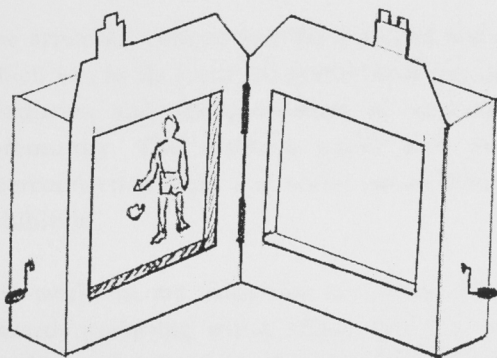


Figure 24: Crime and Punishment.
Working drawing.

Conclusion

"....children who are one of the most vulnerable and powerless groups in our society are not only not protected but 'protection' is actually given to the punisher"¹¹

The power structure within our society supports the rights of parents over the rights of children. Defined and enforced through legal decree, the use of physical chastisement has been naturalised as a disciplinary tool by many parents. Dismissing the consequences of "poisonous pedagogy" through the use of concepts such as "I am living proof that child beating is not necessarily harmful, for in spite of it I became a decent person"¹², prejudices the need for social reform by perpetuating the cycle of violence.

The works are intended to be viewed in a gallery space in order to provide a stimulus for debate within an art academic arena. By placing images of "private" violence in a public space I am questioning the validity of classifying violence within the home as something other than common assault.

The artworks form part of the extended body of my postgraduate research which has as its focus the subordinate positioning of children both by the producers and the consumers of artworks as well as by the wider community. The research paper also details some of the complex interconnecting legal and social issues which underpin the works in my exhibition.

The works in my exhibition are intended to question common attitudes towards parenting which affirm that the use of physical chastisement is justified and natural. I seek to challenge the way in which physical harm is rationalised as being for the child's own good.

The Original Proposal

The practical component of my postgraduate study will result in a series of ten "books". These books will be related to the theoretical component of my program by subject matter. Though the subject of child abuse will be the central focus, the images will not necessarily depict violence towards children, rather, the images will operate on the axis of an emotional response to domestic violence. The surface of the plates will be treated in a manner (using deep-biting and other techniques) that is intended to convey the tacitility of violence in the final print. The books will act as a site that is intended to house the prints, with the aim to reference the domestic origins of the work, and therefore will not always take on the traditional book form.

Method:

In support of the practical component to my study I will need access to the computer laboratory, the Graphic Investigations facilities and the Printmaking facilities.

Schedule:

April-September: I will be developing a body of images and possible construction layout for the ten books. This work will be in the form of an artist's diary which will contain images, technical notes, diagrams and other relevant notes.

October: The first week will be spent testing the acids and equipment in the workshop. The second week will be spent on the construction of the first book, which will be in a "box" form, and will be approximately 7cm x 10cm x 5cm with one page that will unfold to approximately 40cm.

November: Further develop the book form as a site for "housing" the prints. I aim to have six books completed by the end of November.

December: I aim to have constructed all ten books and prepare them for exhibition. The exhibition will take the form of an installation.

January: Further refine the product and work on the exhibition. I intend to give the exhibition a relevant title which is not yet decided.

Amendment

The course schedule was amended. S. Nicholls (for Rosemary Young Executive Officer (Student Administration)) informed me of the amendment details by letter. The Letter, dated 11 September 1995, stated:

Dear Joseph

I am writing to advise that following the mid-course review, the panel recommended that you extend your course of study by six months.

This recommendation has been approved by the Prescribed Authority. You are now expected to complete your course in August 1996.

Bibliography

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Curriculum Vitae

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Footnotes

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